

10 most vulnerable House members: GOP in suburbs, 'blue wave' Democrats

Stephanie Akin, Bridget Bowman, and Kate Ackley

The most competitive House races this cycle reflect the turbulence and rancor that dominate the nation's politics in 2020. Many incumbents, in both parties, face perilous paths to reelection, and this list of the 10 most vulnerable provides a snapshot of some of the larger trends at play in battleground districts.



Nebraska Republican Don Bacon is seeking a third term in the kind of suburban district where his party is struggling.

Republicans in suburban stretches, such as Nebraska's Don Bacon, who has moved up to No. 1, or Ohio's Steve Chabot, who joins the list, will seek to hang on even as their constituents increasingly reject President Donald Trump. As a result, the Democrats' map has expanded into districts previously thought safe for the GOP. Many of those seats are open, however, since potentially vulnerable incumbents opted to leave Congress.

Democrats are still defending 30 House seats that Trump carried in 2016, many represented by freshmen elected in 2018's blue wave. Most of these incumbents hold a strong financial advantage. They include South Carolina's Joe Cunningham, who comes off the list as Republicans have struggled to chip away at his moderate profile. Others, though, remain in tough fights as they work to polish their brands, separate from their party.

Republicans Rodney Davis of Illinois and Scott Perry of Pennsylvania and Democrat Kendra Horn of Oklahoma fall off the rankings too, but they still face competitive

races. Fifteen-term Minnesota Democrat Collin C. Peterson is back on the list, a nod to Trump's potential strength in rural America.

New to the list of vulnerable incumbents are California Democrat TJ Cox, who will see whether the prevailing winds of his blue district will be enough for him to weather ethics problems, and New Jersey Republican Jeff Van Drew, a Democrat-turned-Trump ally in a district where the president is struggling.

These districts' 2016 presidential results were factored into the rankings, along with conversations with strategists on both sides of the aisle and race ratings from *Inside Elections with Nathan L. Gonzales*.

[Lindsey Graham now among Senate's 10 most vulnerable]

Here are the 10 House incumbents who are most vulnerable less than four weeks before the election:



1. Don Bacon (R) Nebraska's 2nd District

Trump's 2016 margin: **+2**

Bacon's 2018 margin: **+2**

RACE RATING: **TOSS-UP**

Bacon faces strong headwinds as he seeks to fend off Democrat Kara Eastman, who came within 2 points of unseating him in 2018 with little outside help. This year, national Democrats see the district, in Omaha and its suburbs, as one of their best pickup opportunities and have invested accordingly. With an *Electoral College* vote at stake, both presidential campaigns are spending here. A recent *New York Times/Siena College* survey showed district voters backing Joe Biden by 7 points. The same poll found Bacon up by 2. But the incumbent will have to outperform the president for his argument that Eastman is too liberal for the district to stick.



2. Xochitl Torres Small (D) New Mexico's 2nd District

Trump's 2016 margin: **+10**

Torres Small's 2018 margin: **+2**

RACE RATING: **TILT DEMOCRATIC**

This race has remained relatively stable since former state Rep. Yvette Herrell won the GOP primary in August by doubling down on support for Trump, setting up a rematch from 2018. The handful of publicly released polls have shown a razor-thin race. Torres Small, a water rights lawyer, has been on the air highlighting her work

to lower prescription drug prices and her support of a *Trump-backed trade deal*. National Republicans have hit back with ads presenting her as a *Nancy Pelosi-aligned liberal* working to *end oil and gas production* and kill jobs in the state. Those are formidable attacks in this rural district.



3. Max Rose (D) **New York's 11th District**

Trump's 2016 margin: **+10**

Rose's 2018 margin: **+6**

RACE RATING: **TOSS-UP**

Rose moves up the list as Republicans have grown increasingly bullish about defeating him. In a Staten Island district that's home to many police officers and firefighters, the GOP has been tying the freshman to calls to defund law enforcement, something he opposes. Democrats still consider Rose, who deployed with the National Guard to help with pandemic response efforts, a strong incumbent. He's launched recent ads slamming Democratic New York Mayor Bill de Blasio and highlighting his military service. Rose has had a consistent financial edge over Republican Nicole Malliotakis, raising more than \$2 million to the state assemblywoman's \$1 million in the third quarter. But the district is still tough terrain.



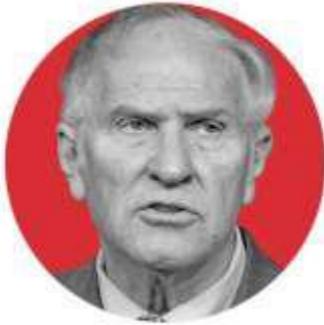
4. John Katko (R) **New York's 24th District**

Trump's 2016 margin: **-4**

Katko's 2018 margin: **+5**

RACE RATING: **TILT REPUBLICAN**

Katko has survived tough political environments before, leaning on his background as a prosecutor and his more moderate profile. But the anti-Trump sentiment in his Syracuse-based district could overwhelm Katko, who faces a rematch against former college professor Dana Balter. Republicans view Balter as a weak challenger who is too liberal for the swing district, noting that Katko defeated her even as the 2018 blue wave swept out other GOP incumbents. But Balter believes Katko's early pledge to vote for Trump will alienate voters who do not support the president. Biden is expected to carry the district in November, so the challenge facing Katko is how far he can outrun the top of the ticket.



5. Steve Chabot (R) Ohio's 1st District

Trump's 2016 margin: **+7**

Chabot's 2018 margin: **+4**

RACE RATING: **TOSS-UP**

Chabot, who has represented the 1st District for all but one term since 1995, is frequently a top Democratic target. But Republicans argue he is a survivor: He prevailed against well-funded and well-established Democrat Aftab Pureval in 2018, thanks to a Democratic campaign finance scandal. This year, Chabot faces health care executive Kate Schroder, a political newcomer and cancer survivor who talks frequently about health care. Schroder doesn't have Pureval's baggage, and Democrats and Republicans alike say the district's suburban terrain helps her: It includes a chunk of Democratic Cincinnati along with its conservative suburbs. And given Trump's suburban struggles this year, Schroder may be able to pull off what Pureval could not.



6. TJ Cox (D) California's 21st District

Trump's 2016 margin: **-16**

Cox's 2018 margin: **+.08**

RACE RATING: **TOSS-UP**

Strategists in both parties acknowledge Cox faces a tough race against former GOP Rep. David Valadao, whom he unseated by less than 1,000 votes in 2018. Valadao has been a strong fundraiser and is well known in the Central Valley district. Democrats are working to tie him to Trump, who lost the heavily Hispanic district by double digits in 2016, and will likely lose it again. But Cox has been dogged by Republican ads highlighting his financial controversies. (Cox told the Washington Examiner the attacks were false). Outside groups have spent more than \$6.6 million on the race, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.



7. Mike Garcia (R) California's 25th District

Trump's 2016 margin: **-7**

Garcia's 2020 special election margin: **+10**

RACE RATING: **TOSS-UP**

Garcia topped the list of vulnerable Republicans back in August, but moves down as other lawmakers face tougher races. But as the only GOP incumbent running in a district where Hillary Clinton won more than 50 percent of the vote, Garcia is still looking vulnerable. He faces state Assemblywoman Christy Smith, whom he defeated in a May 12 special election for the seat north of Los Angeles left open by the resignation of Democrat Katie Hill. Smith has shaken up her campaign team since the special election. Republicans consider Garcia a strong incumbent, but the electorate is expected to shift toward Democrats in November compared to the May race.



8. Collin C. Peterson (D) Minnesota's 7th District

Trump's 2016 margin: **+31**

Peterson's 2018 margin: **+4**

RACE RATING: **TILT DEMOCRATIC**

Peterson has long survived as a conservative Democrat in a deep-red western Minnesota district, helped by his anti-abortion views and other votes that put him at odds with his own party. The House Agriculture chairman voted against impeaching Trump, for example. But this year, amid intense partisanship and a well-funded challenger, Peterson's shot for a 16th term is in doubt. Republican Michelle Fischbach, the state's former lieutenant governor, hauled in \$1 million in the third quarter, more than four times what Peterson's 2018 opponent, Dave Hughes, raised in the whole cycle. And Hughes still came within 5 points of winning. With Trump voters motivated in this rural stretch of the state, Peterson's in real trouble.



9. Anthony Brindisi (D) New York's 22nd District

Trump's 2016 margin: **+15**

Brindisi's 2018 margin: **+2**

RACE RATING: **TILT DEMOCRATIC**

Brindisi remains vulnerable given the partisan lean of his upstate New York district, which Trump carried by double digits in 2016. Brindisi launched TV ads early in the race and has had a consistent financial advantage. But Republicans believe GOP voters will come back to their partisan corner, backing Trump and former Rep. Claudia Tenney, whom Brindisi narrowly defeated in 2018. Brindisi has kept his focus on local issues, including requiring the Defense Department to [purchase cutlery made in the United States](#), which benefits businesses in the district. But Republicans have cast Brindisi as anti-Trump, noting his vote to impeach the president.



10. Jeff Van Drew (R) New Jersey's 2nd District

Trump's 2016 margin: **+5**

Van Drew's 2018 margin (as a Democrat): **+8**

RACE RATING: **TOSS-UP**

Van Drew made a bet back in 2019 that conservative Southern New Jersey voters would be so angry about Trump's impeachment that he would have a better chance winning in 2020 as a Republican. But a lot has changed since he switched parties. His Democratic opponent, Amy Kennedy, has been hammering him for putting his political career above the needs of his constituents. Kennedy said last week that she pulled in \$2.2 million in the third quarter, putting her on track to make up for a cash-on-hand disadvantage after a heated primary. And a Monmouth University poll this week showed her with a 4-point lead.